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Special Feature: The Vicissitudes of the Sufi Movement in Society: Past and Present

Editor's Preface

AKAHORI Masayuki*

The title for the special feature in the English part of this volume is “The Vicissitudes of the Sufi Movement in Society: Past and Present.” It includes four articles, all of which are based on papers read at a session of the same title in the World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES) held at the Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara last August. TONAGA Yasushi of Kyoto University and I organized the session, focusing on the social aspects of the Sufi movement. The papers read there were enlarged and revised to reflect the questions and comments at the conference, and I am particularly grateful to two discussants at the session, TONAGA and Marc Toutant (Centre d'Études Turques, Ottomanes, Balkaniques et Centrasiatiques/CETOBaC-EHESS, Paris) for their help in clarifying arguing points in these articles.

The articles also show the latest achievement of the joint research group on Sufism and saint veneration in Islam. Tonaga and I started this joint research in 1997, with participation from scholars of Islamic thought, history, and anthropology. As such, the four papers deal with different times, from the sixteenth century to the present, and materials range from historical sources to data collected in fieldworks.

The first paper is entitled “A Preliminary Outlook on al-Sha‘rānī’s Defence of Ibn ‘Arabī and the Intellectual Milieu during Early Ottoman Egypt.” Its author, ENDO Haruka, is a doctoral student in the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London. She takes up the great scholar al-Sha‘rānī and analyzes his thought as a Sufi. She concentrates her point on how al-Sha‘rānī defended Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of self-manifestation and how he tried to settle the dispute about anthropomorphism in sixteenth-century Ottoman Egypt.

The second paper is written by TAKAHASHI Kei, who is a visiting fellow of the Institute of Asian Cultures Research Institute of Toyo University and also of Asian Cultures of Sophia University. Its title is “Tariqas and Benevolent Associations in Early Twentieth-Century Egypt: The Case of the Society of the ‘Azmīya Brothers in Alexandria.” His subject, the Society of the ‘Azmīya Brothers in Alexandria, is a benevolent association with a modern organizational form. It was founded by the Ṭarīqa ‘Azmīya. An analysis of articles of incorporation and other agreements of the Society shows how *ṭarīqa* ran counter to nineteenth-century modernist criticism of Sufi orders and how Sufis tried to modernize their organizations.

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The third paper is by MARUYAMA Daisuke, a research fellow of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). It pays close attention to contemporary Sudan and compares two Sufi orders: the Qādirīya and the Rukaynīya. In this paper, “Redefining Sufism in Its Social and Political Contexts: The Relationship between Sufis and Salafis in Contemporary Sudan,” he utilizes the theory of the three-axis framework on Sufism advocated by TONAGA and suggests the adoption of “communality” rather than “popular cult” as the third axis with the other two axes, “ethics” and “mysticism.” With this new framework, he shows how the ironic situation of Sudanese Sufis has been produced, where they insist on the communality of all Muslims, and indeed of all human beings, while their enmity toward Salafi and other Sufi groups causes them to prioritize the communality of their own group.

Subsequently, my paper, “Toward a Dynamic View of Sufism and Saint Veneration in Islam: An Anthropological Approach,” comes at the end. Based on fieldwork in Egypt and the U. S. A., it explores the relation between Sufism and saint veneration rather than Sufism itself. The paper shows examples of ordinary Sufi disciples who often consider their group’s founder a saint worthy of veneration rather than a master commendable for his teachings. It also includes an example of a Bedouin ritual, which, despite its formal resemblance to the *dhikr* of Sufis, is performed by those with no knowledge of Sufism. These examples are offered as proof for my theory of the dynamic composition of Sufism and saint veneration in Islam.

As mentioned earlier, all four articles are the result of our joint research group. This group has published books in Japanese as well as other collected feature articles in academic journals in English before, and the list below deserves further reference.

“New Emerging Networks of Sufis and Saint Venerators in Contemporary Islam,”
ed. by Akahori M. *The Journal of Sophia Asian Studies* 31 (2013), pp. 1–84 (5
articles).

“Narrating the Narrative of Saints,” ed. by Tonaga Y. *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic
Area Studies* 6 (2013), pp. 1–58 (4 articles).

“Sufis and Saints Facing the Government and the Public,” ed. by Takahashi K.
Orient: Reports of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan 46 (2011),
pp. 1–93 (6 articles).

“Rethinking Tariqa,” ed. by Tonaga Y. *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies* 2 (1)
(2008), pp. 1–68 (5 articles).

“The Tariqa’s Cohesional Power and the Shaykhhood Succession Question,” ed. by
Tonaga Y. *Asian and African Area Studies* 7 (1) (2007), pp. 1–64 (4 articles).

“Birth and Succession of Holiness among Sufis and Saints,” ed. by Tonaga Y.
Orient: Reports of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan 42 (2007),
pp. 1–93 (4 articles).

“Sufism and Tariqa Movements in the Era of Islamic Resurgence,” ed. by Tonaga Y. *Annals of the Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 21 (2) (2006), pp. 1–74 (4 articles).

“Towards New Perspectives on Studies of Sufis, Saints and Sayyid/Sharifs,” ed. by Akahori M. *The Journal of Sophia Asian Studies* 22 (2004), pp. 1–86 (8 articles).

Fortunately, our joint research group has obtained solid financial support through these eighteen years. They are mainly in the form of Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Technology or the JSPS. Subsidies from the National Institutes for the Humanities (NIHU) also have given us great help. The special issue of this volume is funded particularly by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 23310186 and by a subsidy from the Islamic Area Studies Project of the NIHU. I would like to render my sincere gratitude to those organizations and to all the members of the joint research group, including those not mentioned above.